

YOUTH'S PERCEPTION ON THE SPIRIT AND ACHIEVEMENT OF THE 1971 LIBERATION WAR OF BANGLADESH: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

H M Mostafizur Rahman^{1*}, Syadani Riyad Fatema²,

¹Lecturer, Department of Bangladesh and Liberation War Studies, Noakhali Science and Technology University (NSTU), Bangladesh,

²Lecturer in Sociology, Noakhali Science and Technology University (NSTU), Bangladesh, Email: riya.syadani.fatema@gmail.com

Corresponding Author

Email: mostafiznstu1971@gmail.com

Abstract:-

Bangladesh as a nation state is yet struggling to ensure full rights for the citizens since its independence in 1971, which was achieved by the dint of killing about 3 million lives, raping 2,00,000 women, and displacing 10 million people. This country had to face several military interventions through its democratic journey from birth. Therefore, the democratic process has been hampered and did not flourish on its natural flow. In addition, the extremist Islamic political parties (who played a predominantly antagonistic role during the 1971 liberation war) also continued their backdoor politics against the sentiment of the 1971 liberation war as well as against the liberal political party such as Bangladesh Awami League. For these obstructions on the way to the smooth development of this country, mass people to the scholars are now in qualm about how far to go to ensure the fruit of independence for its citizens. However, this contradiction has created the two groups broadly: one group argues that people of this free country yet to wait for enjoying the basic needs/rights, and the other group out rightly supports that people are happy on the point that they, at least, are living in their own country which has its separate sovereignty. This paper considered ten university students from the University of Dhaka and Noakhali Science and Technology University purposively for in-depth interviews. The study was conducted to know about how the youths perceive the spirit and achievement of the 1971 liberation war in this twenty-first century. Results show that the students are very positive about the achievement of the 1971 liberation war and they are very enthusiastic to know about this blood sacrificing war

Keywords: - Bangladesh, 1971 liberation war, spirit, achievement, youth

INTRODUCTION

The independence of Bangladesh lies on the killing about 3 million people, raping 2,00,000 women, and displacing 10 million people (Bose, 2007). These hatred ingenuities were executed by the military of Pakistan (known as West Pakistan before 1971). Scholars and historians identified the attack/violence of the Pakistani Army as inhuman, which results enormous loss of the people of East Pakistan/East Bengal (Saikia, 2007; Ranjan, 2016; Mookherjee, 2006). It is also identified as genocide by scholars and international organizations. For example, the International Commission of Jurists termed the 1971 liberation war as: 'the indiscriminate killing of civilians, including women and children and the poorest and weakest members of the community; the attempt to exterminate or drive out of the country a large part of the Hindu population; the arrest, torture and killing of Awami League activists and students, professionals, businessmen and other potential leaders among the Bengalis; the raping of women; the destruction of villages and towns' (Kuper, 1981)

In addition, Beachler (2007) argued that the attack of West Pakistan over East Pakistan was an absolute symbol of genocide. To him, it was a targeted killing of some specific group of people. The following statement would make it clear

A variety of sources depict systematic killing, rape, and destruction by the Pakistani army consistent with genocide. They witness and journalistic accounts are not absolute proof of genocide, but they do indicate that the atrocities continued throughout the nine months of military repression in East Pakistan and that they occurred in many regions of the country. These reports indicate that students, politicians, and intellectuals, Awami League activists and Hindus were special targets of the army' (Beachler, 2007)

However, this genocide had given the birth of newly independent nation, and the 1971 liberation war shaped the unique nationalism among the people of the newly born country named as Bangladesh. It is worth to note here that the independence of this country lied on the autonomy movement (of the province), which is known as the six-point movement, initiated in 1966 by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (the father of the nation). The construction of Bangladeshi nationalism represents its pride in front of the nations of the world because of its historic victory through nine months blood sacrificing war. The father 'Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman' of the newly born nation state also led the liberation war and made it possible for the Bangladeshi to be known as the brave nation in the world. However, today in the 21st century, people are divided into a couple of groups and they are unsure whether the citizens of Bangladesh are capable to enjoy the fruit of the 1971 liberation war. The exploitation and oppressive conditions on which the people of this land fought will ever or not. Furthermore, there is also a concern whether the spirit of the liberation war is spreading among the youths of this country, who are the actual future nation builders. It is really important to know how the youths of Bangladesh perceive the spirit of the 1971 liberation war in the twenty-first century. Therefore, this study was initiated to know how the youths perceive about the achievement of the 1971 liberation war, and whether the spirit of this liberation war influences these youths to the date

Methodology

Considering the sensitivity of the research topic, the present study applied the qualitative approach for the data collection purpose. To explore the essence/spirit and achievement of the 1971 liberation war, the in-depth interviewing approach was applied to collect the necessary data. Sixteen students were approached for the interview purpose, however, ten students agreed and participated. Therefore, the participation rate was 62.5%. These ten students from two public universities such as five students from the University of Dhaka and five students from the Noakhali Science and Technology University (NSTU) were purposively chosen for in-depth interviews. The study did not receive funding from any source, therefore, the respondents were confined to ten. The in-depth interviews were taken between from 15 January to 14 February 2018, and the data were analyzed thematically. The names used in this research are metaphorical, to maintain the ethical consideration of the research.

Lesson on the 1971 liberation war within the family

The history, pride, tradition, and culture of a particular nation-state can be carried out decades after decades by taking proper steps in several ways. If the senior citizens, such as grandparents and parents who had the direct experience of the 71 liberation war, share what happened during the war and why the war took place, the youths will have the chance to carry the spirit forward. All that it means, the family can be the first place for the youths to learn about the true spirit of the 1971 liberation war through the socialization process. None of my family members joined in the liberation war directly, but they were the sufferer unlike the other people during the time of war. Albeit, my father inspires by telling his struggle during the wartime which gives me mental strength to carry the spirit of being true Bangladeshi (Lincon, age 23, 3rd year student, University of Dhaka). My grandfather is a freedom fighter. He always talks about the birth of our nation and the ways how the freedom fighters fought with the Pakistani military. He deliberately says that there none in the world who had to sacrifice so many lives for achieving the independence unlike Bangladesh (Shoma, age 21, 1st year student, NSTU). Beyond the family sphere, media can play an important role to spread the spirit of the 1971 liberation war.

Role of media in spreading the spirit of the 1971 liberation war

Both electronic and print media are very important wings to spread the true spirit of the liberation war of Bangladesh. It is true that Bangladeshi media always try to focus on the spirit of the liberation war through broadcasting different news, talk shows, drama, and other relevant programs. I watch the liberation war-related movies on the

television, from where I get to know many things about the birth of my country. However, these movies are only broadcasted in the specific months only (especially during the month of February, March, and December). The movies and other relevant programs on the liberation war, which can teach the true spirit of the liberation war, should be broadcasted in the rest of the months of a calendar too. By doing this, we will have the chance to be attached with the spirit of the liberation war all the year round (Rahman, age 25, 4th year student, NSTU). Apparently, it seems that the issue of our liberation war has become a specific seasonal topic to broadcast. We do not see different types of programs about the pride of the liberation war throughout the year. This is really unfortunate for us not having distinctive types of programs to teach us on about the blood sacrificing war. However, I do read books on the liberation war (Fahim, age 25, Master's student, University of Dhaka)

Debate on achievements of the independent Bangladesh to the date

The achievement of Bangladesh regarding socio-economic development, equal rights for the women at workplace, political stability, education, and ensuring the basic rights for the mass people is a debatable issue. There are both positive and negative arguments/evidence (based on the national and international reports on the above-mentioned indicators) about the achievements of Bangladesh to the date. However, this study solely focuses on what the youths, especially the students who will drive the nation in future, think and perceive about the achievements of independent Bangladesh to the date. The achievement of Bangladesh in terms of economic development, maintaining a democratic atmosphere, women's empowerment, and so on is enormous. However, image of the country yet to regain by minimizing excessive corruption from top to bottom level, mafiaocracy (presence of muscle men in the arena of politics under the shelter of political leaders) within the political parties, gender violence both in public and private sphere, intolerant nature among the political parties, and so on. I do not think the mass people of the country are fully enjoying the fruit of independence yet. The unemployment rate is high and increasing day by day. Youths have accepted the notion that they will not get the government job without cash money transaction and/or strong request/lobby from the political leaders of ruling parties or from the secretariat. People are still starving and not happy with the basic services such as education, food security, education quality and so on provided by the government and its associated institutions. Moreover, corruption lies in every stage from the root to the state level. (Toma, age 24, 2nd year student, University of Dhaka). It is true that we are living now in our own independent land and the world respects us as a free country. Our country has got the status of being known as Bangladesh in the world map. However, our motherland lacks behind to ensure the women's equal rights everywhere, from home to the workplace. For example, I am a girl and I do not feel safe to go outside at night. Why? My parents try to send my brother with me if I need to go outside even in the evening. Being a girl, I do not feel safe going outside even in the evening (Sathi, age 21, 1st year student, NSTU). However, there are also some notable achievements of this country which were mentioned by some of the respondents especially regarding social development and women's empowerment. Bangladesh has achieved noteworthy involvement in social development irrespective to the political and socio-economic hindrances. This country has progressed remarkably regarding admittance to education and women empowerment, which are both vibrant reasons for its vigorous social development (Anupom, age 25, Masters Student, University of Dhaka). About women's empowerment, our country achieved remarkable progress. The standard of women's life, compared to other developing countries as well as compared to the past years, has attracted the whole world. Women are participating in the development processes and they are contributing to the economic growth from even the grass root level. Girls are encouraged to be educated which was rare two decades ago (Sumona Haq, age 23, 4th year student, NSTU). It is true that there are some aspects such as ensuring some of the basic rights of the people, controlling corruption, women's full freedom and so on, where Bangladesh did not achieve its goals as expected. On the other hand, this country is still fighting to ensure these basic rights and to bring a revolution in all sectors. More importantly, it has achieved some important and timely demands socio-economic indicators such as women's empowerment, the continuation of liberal political and religious sentiments etc.

How far to go?

The day is not too far away when Bangladesh will be known as the model for developing countries. The main asset of this country is its traditions, customs, and brave history. There is none who can stop this country because the birth of this country lies on sacrificing lives. No other nation but only the people of this territory sacrificed their blood for protecting their mother language. I believe it is a matter of time for the citizens of this country to enjoy the full benefit of its independence (Rajib Mia, age 26, Master's student, University of Dhaka). Bangladesh has recently achieved the status of 'developing country' by the World Bank. This country has achieved enormous advancement regarding the socio-economic sphere. This is why World Bank has changed the status of this country and thereafter it is the expectation of the international communities to carry the development speed in future in each sector. However, there is a huge gap between the poor and rich people: the rich people are becoming richer day by day and the poor people are becoming poorer. This is because of having maximum resources in the hands of the minimum number of people. Corruption is the main obstacle to ensuring the basic rights of the mass people. This is the perfect time for independent Bangladesh to announce for another war against corruption exist from top to bottom in every sector. Only then its countrymen can enjoy the true benefit of the blood sacrificing liberation war. The time is not so far away from today when the state will ensure the basic rights of the people, and none but the well-educated youths will bring the golden day bearing the true spirit of the 1971 liberation war. The discussion can end up with a valuable statement of a student-I think Bangladesh could reach the highest peak of development in all sectors by the course of time of its independence, but it did not happen due to the national and international conspiracy. The military intervention in the democratic process obstructed the smooth development of this country several times. In addition, the alliance of the Islamic extremist political party (who played

the antagonistic role during the liberation war) with a specific political party has violated the true flourishing of the spirit of the 1971 liberation war. However, the dark is going to over and the light of enlightenment pouring our nation towards a great advancement (Farhat, age 25, Master's student, NSTU)

Conclusion

Bangladesh is a land of 1,47,610 square kilometers with its huge population approximately 16 crores. With the change of time and context, this country has been drawn the attention of international communities as a country of potentialities and development and established its own culture and pride throughout the world.

After 47 years of achieving independent Bangladesh, we have lots of achievements; such as

- Achieving the status of the developing country by the World Bank in 2018
- Achieved the highest literacy rate (72.76%) over the past decade in 2016
- Huge technological advancement in digital Bangladesh
- Maintaining good relations with neighboring countries
- Exporting products like garments, knitwear in Europe, USA
- The peace treaty with the people of Hill tracks
- Women empowerment
- Reducing early marriage
- Increasing awareness for literacy and allocation for education
- Introducing effective laws to reduce repression on women
- Resolving dispute over maritime land with Myanmar
- Outstanding performance in reducing child and women mortality
- Taking many initiatives for freedom fighters from governments
- Formation of International war criminal tribunal
- Most importantly, turning the huge population into resources instead of a burden and so on

On the other hand, we have some bad reputations too, especially regarding the following issues

- Corruption and nepotism in almost every sectors
- Political greediness of political leaders
- Misuse of power is everywhere
- Mastanocracy under the shelter of political leaders
- Lack of patriotism and nationalism
- Unexpected influence of the international communities

However, the best thing is that the youths, despite living in the age of technology and materialistic world, are bearing and raring the spirit of the 1971 liberation war and they are aware of the achievements of this country to the date. Development is not a matter of a day, it is a process. We believe these youths can be hopeful to make this country a real dreamland with their hard labour and perseverance. The young generation is the asset of this country and it can be argued that the true spirit of the liberation war of 1971 will be passed to the next generation through them. It is also true that the mass killing (known as operation searchlight on 25 March of 1971) executed by the Pakistani Army was hated by the overwhelming majority of countries of the world as well as by the international communities, which forced a large number of people of East Pakistan or East Bengal to cross the border towards India (Datta, 2012; Linton, 2010). And it is worth to mention here that India welcomed those refugees. With the change of time and context, this Bangladesh has established its own culture and pride throughout the world today

Funding

The authors have not declared a specific grant for this research from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors

Contributors

Both HMMR and SRF have planned and designed the study. SRF conducted the literature search. Both of the authors collected in the data and completed the transcriptions and translations procedures, as well as contributed to the final write-up

Competing

Interests none declared.

Consent from the respondents

A consent was taken verbally from the respondents before taking the interviews

Bibliography Akmam,

- [1]. W. (2002). Atrocities against humanity during the liberation war in Bangladesh: A case of genocide. *Journal of Genocide Research*, 4(4), 543-559. Beachler, D. (2007).

- [2]. The politics of genocide scholarship: the case of Bangladesh. *Patterns of prejudice*, 41(5), 467-492. Bose, S. (2007).
- [3]. Losing the victims: Problems of using women as weapons in recounting the Bangladesh war. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 3864-3871. Datta, A. (2012)
- [4]. *Refugees and borders in South Asia: the great exodus of 1971*. Routledge. Kuper, L. (1981).
- [5]. *Genocide: Its political use in the twentieth century*. Yale University Press. Linton, S. (2010).
- [6]. Completing the circle: accountability for the crimes of the 1971 Bangladesh war of liberation. In *Criminal Law Forum* (Vol. 21, No. 2, pp. 191-311). Springer Netherlands. Mookherjee, N. (2006).
- [7]. 'Remembering to forget': public secrecy and memory of sexual violence in the Bangladesh war of 1971 *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 12(2), 433-450.
- [8]. Ranjan, A. (2016). Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971: Narratives, Impacts and the Actors. *India Quarterly*, 72(2), 132-145.
- [9]. Saikia, Y. (2007). Overcoming the silent archive in Bangladesh: Women bearing witness to violence in the 1971" liberation" war. In *Women and the Contested State: Religion, Violence, and Agency in South and Southeast Asia*. University of Notre Dame Press.